

Journeying Together as a Global Family!

Message of the XXII General Chapter

Greetings Marists of Champagnat, Brothers and Companions!

We want to share with you the joyful experience of the 22nd General Chapter.

The Norandina Province warmly welcomed us to Colombia. They shared their vibrant culture with us, and generously provided opportunities to experience and savour Marist life in this part of the world.

At this Chapter, the first to be held outside Europe, we lived the reality to which we are being called. We formed a rich and diverse community: we gathered from all continents, all Provinces and Districts, Brothers and Lay Marists.

Throughout the forty-four days we shared our hopes and dreams for our Marist future. The discernment which we entered into was a carefully planned and a deliberately structured process of contemplative listening and dialogue. This was a respectful and consensus oriented process to understand what God wants us to be and do.

Our Chapter was enriched by some very special moments:

- With religious of Colombia we met with Pope Francis, who once again inspired us.
- We listened to young people who expressed their gratitude for the Marist way and encouraged us to become even more directly involved in their lives.
- During a full day immersion in Medellin we visited a variety of ministries dedicated to accompanying and assisting people on the margins of life.
- We stood in solidarity with those who, during this time, have been affected by the devastation of hurricanes, earthquakes and violence.
- Br Emili's address to the Chapter helped us focus on crucial current and emerging realities.
- In our fraternal dialogue we have considered and shared, reflected and prayed.
- We have been challenged to let go of old ways, of comfort and security, and to respond genuinely to new needs.

All of these experiences have led us to the five calls and principles below. We are invited to a contemplative reading of these calls; to reflect on how we can make them a reality in our personal lives and those of the communities to which we belong.

**Transform us Jesus, and send us
as a global charismatic family, a beacon of hope in this turbulent world,
to be the face and hands of your tender mercy.**

**Inspire our creativity to be bridge-builders,
to journey with children and young people on the margins of life,
and to respond boldly to emerging needs.**

1. As a global charismatic family, a beacon of hope in this turbulent world

Jesus, today you continue to call us to relate to others in a fundamentally new way (Mk 3, 20-31, 31-35), to listen to your Word and put it into practice, with urgency and without excluding anyone.

You are pressuring us to set out immediately on pathways that lead to the future: that is, as Marists of Champagnat, to:

- form homes that are a light on the hill for those around, giving ourselves wholeheartedly to creating a family style of life that is open to all.
- promote and nourish Marist life in all its diversity, working towards our deeply-felt desire to act as “one global body”¹.
- be open, in all simplicity, to make ourselves available to go beyond geographic or provincial boundaries.
- rediscover, as Brothers, the original passion that inspired us to be Marists.

2. To be the face and hands of your tender mercy

The promise of your Spirit in our lives (Lk 1, 35) urges us to be prophets of mercy and of being brothers and sisters to all.

From this call, we hear you inviting us to:

- get in touch with our inner selves to be able to discover You as a God of love who is revealed in the ordinary events of our lives.
- cultivate a spirituality of the heart, that fills us with joy and makes us inclusive.
- revive the founding spirit of La Valla in our daily lives.
- live life to the full as your witnesses in a fragmented world.

3. Inspire our creativity to be bridge-builders

Like Mary at Cana (Jn 2, 3), we feel challenged by the needs of the world around us.

Inspired by Mary, we feel called to:

- develop a good understanding of our ever-changing world, and face current challenges, without falling into the temptation of “answering questions that no one is asking anymore”. (Pope Francis in Medellin, September 9, 2017)

¹ During the Chapter repeated use was made of the expression *global body* as a synonym of *global family*. That is to say, all Marists of Champagnat belong to a single body or a single charismatic family, and we are being called to act as such.

- be a prophetic reminder of the common dignity and fundamental equality of the entire People of God.
- move away from a culture shaped by “ego-s” and adopt that of the “eco-s” (ecology, ecosystems, an economy of solidarity, ...) to reduce the scandal of indifference and inequality.
- be agents of change, bridge-builders, messengers of peace, transforming the lives of young people through an education that integrates awakening faith and living by Gospel values.

4. To journey with children and young people living on the margins of life

We search for you, Jesus, like Mary, in the caravans of life, in the tumult of our cities (Lk 2, 41-49), and in the masses of displaced people who are seeking a better future for their children.

This is a call that urges us to:

- open the eyes of our heart and hear the cries of children and young people, especially the voiceless and homeless.
- be creative in giving resolute responses to their needs.
- empower those who have no voice, avoiding any paternalism.
- be present in more significant ways among the children and young people on the margins of the world.

5. To respond boldly to emerging needs

Jesus, you went through life doing good and yet many of your contemporaries interpreted your actions narrowly, simply because you were a Galilean, a carpenter, and the son of Mary (Mk 6, 2-3).

Today, too, you continue to challenge us to:

- abandon old paradigms and re-imagine ways of helping people see the love of God in today's world.
- undergo a change of heart and be flexible in our structures, with all the risks entailed, so as to move to the peripheries in defence of the poorest and most vulnerable.
- make a firm commitment to promote and defend the Rights of the Child.
- awaken in ourselves and those around us an ecological awareness that engages us in caring for “our common home”².

So Dear Sisters and Brothers,

² In all the text of the XXII General Chapter, where we speak of *our common home* we are referring to *our Sister, Mother Earth* (St Francis), as Pope Francis did in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'* on the care for our common home.

At this particular time, for the vitality and viability of Marist life and mission we are called to be a genuine global family. Interdependence, rather than isolation and independence, must become the new *normal* for us as Marists. We are called to be witnesses of unity and hope.

We know that plans and strategies are not sufficient. We are called to conversion, both personal and collective. As Marists, we must be true disciples, and our communities must be beacons of light and the Marian face of the Church in the midst of the world.

The revisions to the Constitutions and our new Rule of Life³ give concrete expression to these Chapter calls.

Irrespective of age, nationality, capacity this *Message* is for each of us personally. There can be no *new beginning* without the personal involvement, faith and commitment of each Marist.

Aware that these calls are challenging and even audacious, we rely on Mary, our Good Mother “*who has always done everything for us*”. She will continue to be present with all who are known by her name as we journey together into our third Marist century.

Our task is urgent, and our goal ambitious. God is calling us to be Champagnats today.

“Let’s journey together as a Global Family!”

With affection,

*The Members of the 22nd General Chapter
Rio Negro, 20th October 2017*

³ The XXII General Chapter entrusted the General Council with the final editing of the document which we called the *Rule of Life* throughout the process of revising the Constitutions. Even though this document is yet to be given its definitive title, we refer to it here as the *Rule of Life*, since this describes its style and literary genre.

A NEW LA VALLA: PRINCIPLES AND SUGGESTIONS

A new La Valla, for a new beginning. This is what we General Chapter participants experienced together.

La Valla, the home of our origins, reminds us that Marcellin Champagnat was moved by the needs and possibilities of his surrounds and so listened attentively to the Spirit, to discover what God was asking him at that point in time.

In a similar way, we members of the Chapter undertook a careful discernment exercise, trying to answer the two fundamental questions:

Who is God asking us to be in this emerging world?

What is God asking us to do in this emerging world?

The answers to these two questions have been collected, in their essentials, in **the five calls** presented in the Chapter *Message*.

At the same time, aware that these calls contain concrete implications for all dimensions of our life and mission, we decided to develop the ideas across five areas: our vocation as Brothers; our mission; Brother-Lay relationship, as Marists of Champagnat; government and how we use our resources.

Each section begins with some **principles** or **beliefs** that, in the opinion of capitulants, will open the way for a new beginning among us. Then, by way of a set of **suggestions**, there are some concrete ways of translating these principles into lines of action.

TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING ...

a) ...IN OUR VOCATION AS BROTHERS

For a new beginning as Little Brothers of Mary, as mystics and prophets of a new world, we believe that:

- we must deepen our experience of God who dwells within and in daily life, and so become God's passionate witnesses by full and happy lives.
- we are being invited to make our communities real homes, characterised by genuine relationships that allow us to build bridges between ourselves and with the people we

meet around us.

- we have to embrace a simple lifestyle and experience our vulnerability as a source of fruitfulness and freedom.
- our vocation implies an availability to go anywhere in our worldwide family, working alongside the poor, especially children and young people, to transform the world.
- being brothers is a call to be signs of humanity in all its fullness, which implies healing the wounds of our own lives, promoting the dignity of each person, and caring for our common home.

Therefore, we suggest that:

- Administrative Units launch a program for individuals and communities to reawaken a spirituality and experience of God that is truly integrated and apostolic.
- we undertake a thorough renewal of our community living, sharing the best of ourselves, overcoming any individualism, working on healthy relationships, creating more occasions to be together ... opening our doors to the people around us, developing an intercultural sensitivity so as to build a church with a Marian face.
- every community, administrative unit and the Institute undertake a discernment on its simplicity of life and closeness to the poor, leading us to adopt concrete actions to move out of our comfort zones.
- make personal and community commitments to be more present among young people, being proactive in encouraging them to live out their vocation, and renewing our plans for vocation ministry generally.
- reform our processes of initial and ongoing formation and offer new paths at the level of the Institute and Administrative Units to care for our vocation as brothers: accompaniment, attention to each brother's situation and stage in life.

b) ...IN OUR MISSION

For a new beginning, as Marists of Champagnat, committed to the mission of evangelisation and education, we believe:

- in the cultivation of contemplative practices which give meaning to life, and of being brothers and sisters to offer a prophetic sign in a turbulent world.
- in our evangelizing mission that urges us to respond to the cries of today's children and young people in new and creative ways.
- in our committed, preferential and constant presence among children and young people in the geographical and existential peripheries.
- in promoting, protecting and defending the rights of children and young people, and in empowering them as agents of transformation.
- in urgently changing the way we live based on an *integral ecology* (*Laudato Si'*, ch. IV).

Therefore, we suggest:

- promoting a *culture of encounter* (*Evangelium Gaudium*, 220) through programs and meaningful experiences of encounters with God, with oneself and with others; establishing simple relationships where everyone is heard and valued.
- evaluating and adapting our mission of evangelization to the context of emerging realities.
- building Marist mission networks at the levels of Administrative Units, Regions and the General Administration, which favour innovation and the renewal of our education and evangelization.
- collaborating with other ecclesial and civil institutions, religions and Christian denominations, to provide an inclusive and integrated response to the cries of today's children and young people.
- identifying those who are excluded and displaced (migrants, refugees ...), choosing to be present among them, and decisively committing ourselves to defending their dignity and seeking their inclusion.
- strongly and proactively implementing Child Protection Policies against all forms of abuse that are consistent with internationally recognized agreements which defend the rights of children and young people.
- developing initiatives for the empowerment of children and young people in all our ministries.
- creating an integral ecological awareness in all our communities and different ministries, and developing policies at all levels of the Institute that strengthen our commitment to the care of our 'common home'.

c) ...AS MARISTS OF CHAMPAGNAT

For a new beginning, we believe that ...

- the future for the charism will be founded on a communion of fully committed Marists, brothers and lay.
- as a charismatic family we should walk together respecting the diversity of the Marist world.
- all Marists are co-responsible for Marist life and mission.
- we need new structures and processes that recognize and support our distinctive vocational paths as Marists.

Therefore, we suggest that ...

- each Administrative Unit discerns, proposes and accompanies concrete ways of building up communion as Marists.
- each Administrative Unit develops a plan for promoting different forms of Marist life, including appropriate strategies for formation, accompaniment and belonging, drawing

on the document *Gathered Around the Same Table*, and others, such as *Being a Lay Marist* and the *Project of Life in Fraternity* (CMMF)⁴

- that all levels of government establish and/or strengthen structures for all Marists to share leadership and responsibility for Marist life and mission.
- create ways forward which respond to the reality of each country and accompany Administrative Units to share with one another the variety of experiences being lived across the Marist world.

d) ...IN OUR STYLE OF GOVERNANCE

For a new beginning, we believe in governance that:

- engages in a dynamic of spiritual discernment to be constantly attentive to God's calls.
- favours prophetic servant leadership and closely accompanies Marist life and mission.
- puts in place governance structures that are transparent, simple, efficient and flexible.
- is responsive to emerging calls from children and young people on the peripheries and fosters the care of our common home.
- promotes inclusion and greater co-responsibility between Brothers and Lay Marists.
- promotes and strengthens the Institute as a global family and lets go of structures and attitudes that are not supportive of this.

Therefore, we suggest:

- promoting close personal accompaniment on all levels.
- continuing the processes of regionalization and promotion of inter-regional collaboration to build a Global Body with structures, processes, and strategies that are agile, simple, and participative. We do this by way of following up on the process carried out by the *New Models* project, the contributions of which we acknowledge and support.
- promoting discernment and a rhythm of life that nourishes reflective and productive dialogue on all levels.
- identifying and forming leaders, lay and brothers, at all levels, in order to build up co-responsibility for Marist life and mission.
- that the Superior General and his Council have the flexibility to explore options as to where and how to form community and provide appropriate leadership, as they closely accompany Marist life and mission.

e) ...IN HOW WE MANAGE AND USE OUR RESOURCES

⁴ The text *Gathered Around the Same Table – the vocation of Lay Marists of Champagnat* was published in June 2009. The other two documents, *Being a Lay Marist* and the *Project of life in Fraternity (Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family)* were presented to the General Chapter by the Secretariat for the Laity, after a process that involved wide participation. We consider these texts as *reference documents* for all Marists of Champagnat.

For a new beginning, we believe that:

- our resources must be at the service of the life and mission of the entire Institute.
- we must ensure both the sustainability of our Administrative Units and the Institute as a whole, as well as the principles of transparency and accountability at all levels.
- we must reaffirm the principles found in the *Discernment Plan for the Evangelical Use of our Goods*⁵.
- we need to be a global family in communion and solidarity.
- people are our most important resource.
- we must let go of economic models that lead to: dependency and a failure to take into account local economic and human resources and resourcefulness; the self-referential and fragmented use of resources; a lack of transparency, training and professionalism; barriers that interfere with our ability to live and grow as a global family.

Therefore, we suggest:

- developing a plan for the just sharing of human and financial resources at all levels of the Institute, including finding new sources of income and the creation of services and funds to support formation, solidarity, and an expanded mission.
- develop a plan of action to achieve the sustainability of Marist life and mission at all levels.
- applying the principles found in the *Discernment Plan on the Evangelical Use of Goods*, promoting simplicity of life at all stages of formation as well as in the General Administration and all our communities and ministries.
- developing administrative policies on human and financial resources, in keeping with ethical principles, at all levels of the Institute in the form of a *Vade Mecum* or *Guide*.
- ensuring formation in administration and finances at all levels of the Institute and insisting upon the effective management of resources including: real estate and financial assets; planning; budgeting and controls, external and internal audits; the appointment of professionally prepared personnel to carry out these tasks.

⁵ A document prepared by Br Séan Sammon SG and his Council in 2004, at the request of the XX General Chapter.